

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

**DOWNS COMMITTEE
14TH April 2014**

Report of: Service Director, Environment and Leisure

Title: Downs Ranger Report

Ward: N/A

Officer Presenting Report: Andrew Gordon,
Estates Management Team Leader

Contact Telephone Number: 0117 9736210

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Downs Committee Rock fall Working Group meets to resolve any outstanding issues.

Summary

This report reflects the objectives of the Downs Management Plan and to inform members of progress since the last meeting.

The significant issues in the report are:

- Enjoyment
- Access
- Working Groups
- Landscape
- Wildlife
- Management and Resources.

1. Policy

Not Applicable

2. Consultation

a) Internal

John Williams, Estates Manager.

Andrew Gordon Estates Management team leader

Mike Allen. Business Manager
Becky Coffin Conservation Officer
Richard Ennion, Horticultural Service Manager.
Peter Malarby, Senior Solicitor.
Terry Hannan, Head Gardener, Downs and Blaise

b) External

Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer.
Jack Penrose FOD+AG
Chris Westcott Natural England

3. Context

a) Enjoyment:

The first Star Gazing event at the Downs took place on March 10th and judged a great success. The event was over-subscribed with over seventy attendees on the night.
Further events are planned.

At the January meeting members received a request for a second item of OTIS outdoor training equipment to be installed at the Downs. Members expressed support in principle for the proposal but raised concerns that the promotion on the original item of equipment was too prominent as a result of the amount of advertising displayed on it. I have met with the proposer and he has resubmitted the proposal with a 50% reduction in promotional material and also identified two possible locations including at the back of the Downs changing rooms and adjacent to toilet block to the east of the Water Tower - see attachments (A,B &C)

Following Downs Committee agreement to permit a small area of the Downs to be used for barbecues, an application to Natural England has been submitted. This is to seek consent to carry out works in a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) It is intended that the site will be ready to operate before the Easter break.

Due to the prolonged wet weather this winter football provision for the Downs and University Leagues had to be curtailed due to the condition of the playing surfaces. The season needed to be extended to accommodate postponed matches.

b) Access:

This winter the Downs team opened up a previously obscured view of the Avon Gorge. The area is located along the Promenade opposite Engineers House and involved the removal of selected trees and overgrown scrub. The work was carried out in conjunction with Natural

England and BCC Conservation Officer and will now be further reviewed.

The reinstating of this lost view is an action from the Downs Management Plan and part of a rolling programme of works.

On behalf of Bristol Zoo Gardens the Downs team have undertaken improvements and reinstatement to the temporary Zoo car park. The work involves compaction relief, chain harrowing, importing screened topsoil to repair worn areas and over-seeding with appropriate grass seed.

Several large copses along Saville Road have been cleared of competing scrub this winter. This was a project carried out with Community Payback and the Downs team and is an action from the Downs Management Plan. Community pay back teams have also been involved with litter clearance and the on-going works in the dressing rooms.

Large areas of scrub have also been removed from the Portway and from the goat enclosure.

The in-house security team continue with patrols across the Downs. Since the last meeting Officers and Downs staff have ticketed or removed from the Downs 43 illegally parked cars. Security officers are now on their longer summer hours.

Following a public enquiry about 'advertising vans' regularly seen around the Downs an opinion was sought from the Planning Enforcement team. The conclusion is that at present there is nothing that can be done as long as vehicles are taxed, insured and not causing an obstruction. The implementation of RPZ's and the realisation of the recommendations detailed in the Downs Traffic Plan should resolve this problem in the medium to longer term.

c) Working Groups

Traffic Management Group:

The Traffic Working Group presented its report to the Neighbourhood Partnerships at the end of last year. The presentation of the report completes a lengthy study and as such the work of the group is finished.

Committee may wish to consider that the group should continue to meet occasionally to keep a watching brief on the progress of the recommendations and to report back to Committee.

Members should be aware that due to structural changes within the Council two of its officers are no longer available to sit on this working group. In addition the FODAG representative has resigned. However I have re-established the group to include The Master, Cllr Barbara Janke, Jack Penrose from FODAG and myself.

Rock fall group:

At previous meetings Committee have been kept updated on a serious rock fall at Sea walls, this followed a smaller rock fall incident at Suspension Bridge Road.

i) Sea Walls:

Following an evaluation and tender process carried out by by Parsons Brinckerhoff a contract for the stabilisation works to the Sea Walls rock face has been awarded to CAN Geotechnical Ltd. Work is expected to start later this month.

Members are asked to note the following additional CC engineering fees with respect to Rock Stabilisation works:-

1. Significantly more work than anticipated has been required at the tender stage. An extra 5 hours of both Phil Lloyd's and Patrick Normans time to Phase 2b- Pre- contract Award were required. The revised fee for this Phase will be £1345.
2. With reference to the contractor appointed to do the works CAN the estimate for supervising the works programme will be £1800 with £100 expenses.

Following negotiations between representatives of Sea Walls flats and Council officers an agreement has been reached on the contribution to be made by the owners of the Sea Wall flats to the total contract sum. (members have been circulated the details separately) and the agreed sum has been forwarded to the Council.

Members will be aware about negotiations with an adjoining owner where rock from Sea Walls rock face has fallen on their land are on-going and that there is dispute as to how the removal of the rock is best achieved and their assertion that for the need for extensive stabilisation works on the Avon Gorge Clifton Down rock face known as Blackrock. Members have been consulted and the majority have agreed to the need to seek legal advice on serving notice of the intention to carry out the Stabilisation works in April and whether limited compensation is necessary for loss of amenity value.

In summary

It is recommended that the rock fall working group meets to discuss and resolve any outstanding issues.

ii) Bridge Road:

Parsons Brinckerhoff have completed their report and members will have been circulated the options detailed in the report.

It is recommended that the rock fall working group meet to discuss the proposals and agree an option.

Your Downs:

A small working group composed of Mandy Leivers, representatives from FODAG and the Downs Ranger continue to meet to discuss how best to promote the Downs to a more diverse range of visitors.

This is an aspiration of the Management Plan and seeks to encourage people from all backgrounds and abilities from right across the City.

Good progress has been made and further details will be brought to Committee as the initiative develops.

Inappropriate Behaviour working group:

This working group meets occasionally to consider how best to manage inappropriate behaviour on the Downs.

The group is composed of Cllr. Colin Smith, the Downs Ranger, Anthony Brown (Master M/V) and representatives of Avon and Somerset Police Service (LGBT Liaison) and FODAG.

At the last Downs Committee meeting members agreed the re-forming of the group to look at specific complaints of sexual activity and discarded sex litter.

The working group met in February and agreed a series of actions (appendix1) designed to improve the management of this problem.

d) **Landscape:**

Works to the new children's playground continues. The severe wet Weather this winter did cause some delay but I am advised the play ground will be completed by the end of April. Members may like to consider how best to mark the opening of this new facility.

A large Chestnut tree along the Westbury Road lost a large limb during the winter gales, this led to the rest of the tree becoming unstable. On tree officers advice and on Health and Safety grounds the decision was made to remove the rest of the tree, This was a complex operation requiring heavy lifting equipment and necessitating a road closure.

Several smaller trees also succumbed and have been removed plus a large volume of associated wind- blown tree debris which required clearing.

e) Wildlife:

The goats continue to thrive in the Gully, the long wet spell during the winter had no adverse effects. The named person as the goats legal guardian has now been changed to reflect the retirement of the Downs Ranger.

FODAG members continue with valuable assistance in the management of the livestock.

The Education Officer continues with a busy schedule. Activities for February are detailed in appendix 2

f) Management and Resources:

The Downs team continue with the spring programme of works, carrying out day to day response maintenance in line with the Downs Management Plan, the annual plan and the Avon Gorge Management Plan and in line with the Parks and Open Spaces Grounds Maintenance specification.

On-going general maintenance which includes:

Maintaining spring bedding, managing the goats, clearing litter and emptying litter and dog bins. Grass- cutting, cleaning signs and shelters, graffiti removal, shrub bed maintenance, maintaining herbaceous beds, provision of football pitches and dressing rooms.

4. Finance

Members should be made aware it has recently been brought to my attention by BCC Markets that the concession refreshment van located at Parry Lane has accumulated significant arrears backdating to 2012. As requested by the Lord Mayor and Master at the Agenda Conference further information has been requested from the Markets Manager including reasons why this has been allowed to happen. The action being taken is to terminate the concession, undertake debt recovery and re-tender the concession. We are also looking into ways concessions income for the Downs can be monitored on a regular basis to avoid this situation happening again. The Downs Committee Finance Officer has confirmed that these arrears are not currently reflected in the end of year finance report.

On the positive side I am pleased to inform members that, following completion of the tendering process for The Downs ice cream concession, we have awarded this to Lopresti and Sons.

No other options considered.

Risk Assessment:

No Risk Assessment has been carried out

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

5a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:

- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
- ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.

6. Legal and Resource Implications

Legal

The Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861 provides that the Downs should remain as a place for the resort and recreation of the citizens of Bristol, and that a committee should be appointed to manage them. The recommendations of this report are within the powers conferred by this statute.

Financial

(a) Revenue:

(b) Capital

None

Financial advice provided by Mike Allen. Business Partner.

7. Land

The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.

8. Personnel

Not applicable

Appendices: 1& 2

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: None



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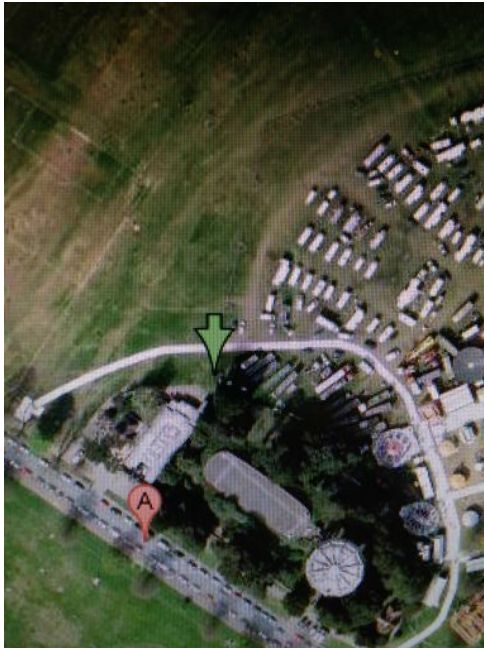
OTIS™ ON THE DOWNS

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DIFFERENCE IN THE
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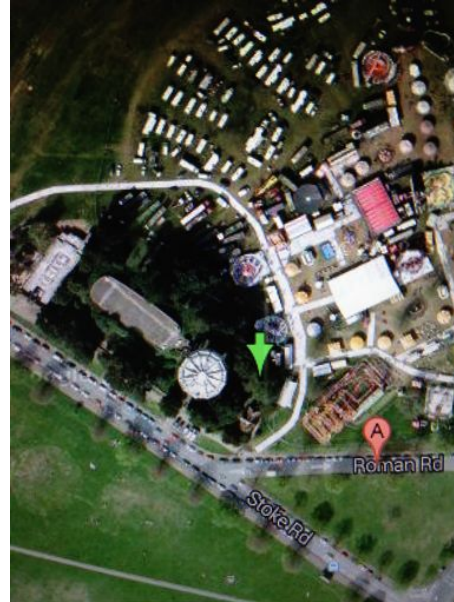
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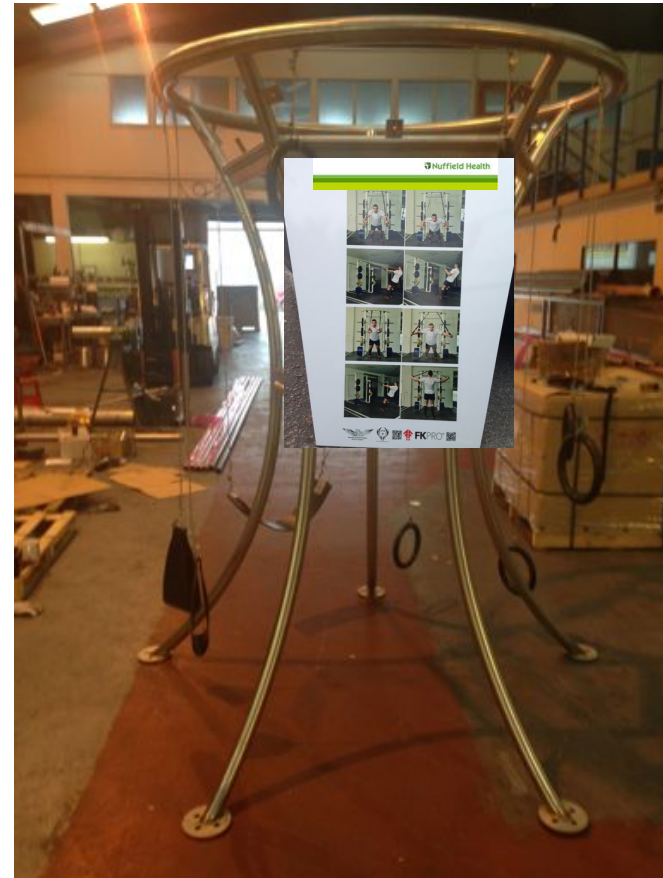
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50% Reduction in advertising space

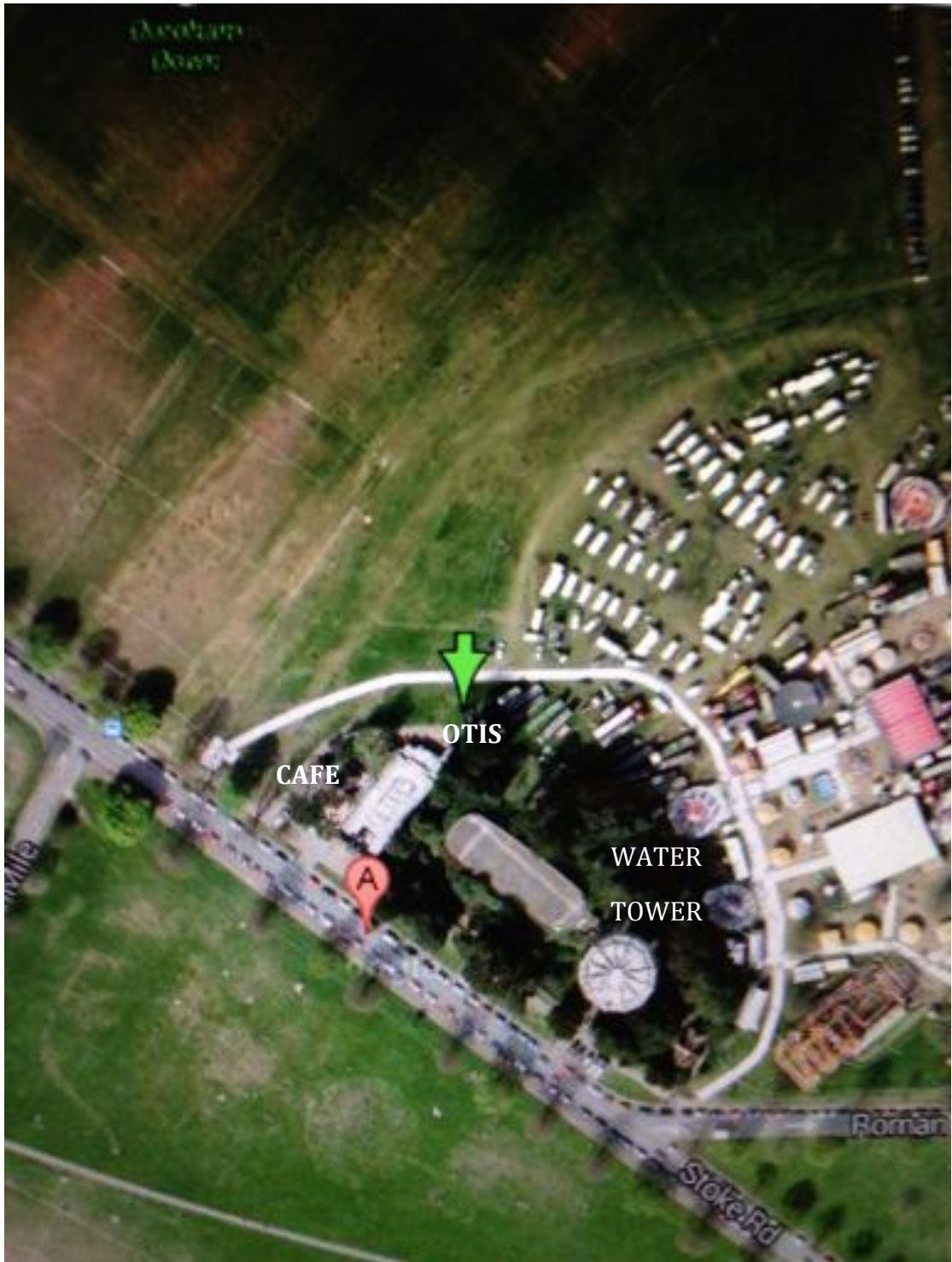


Current

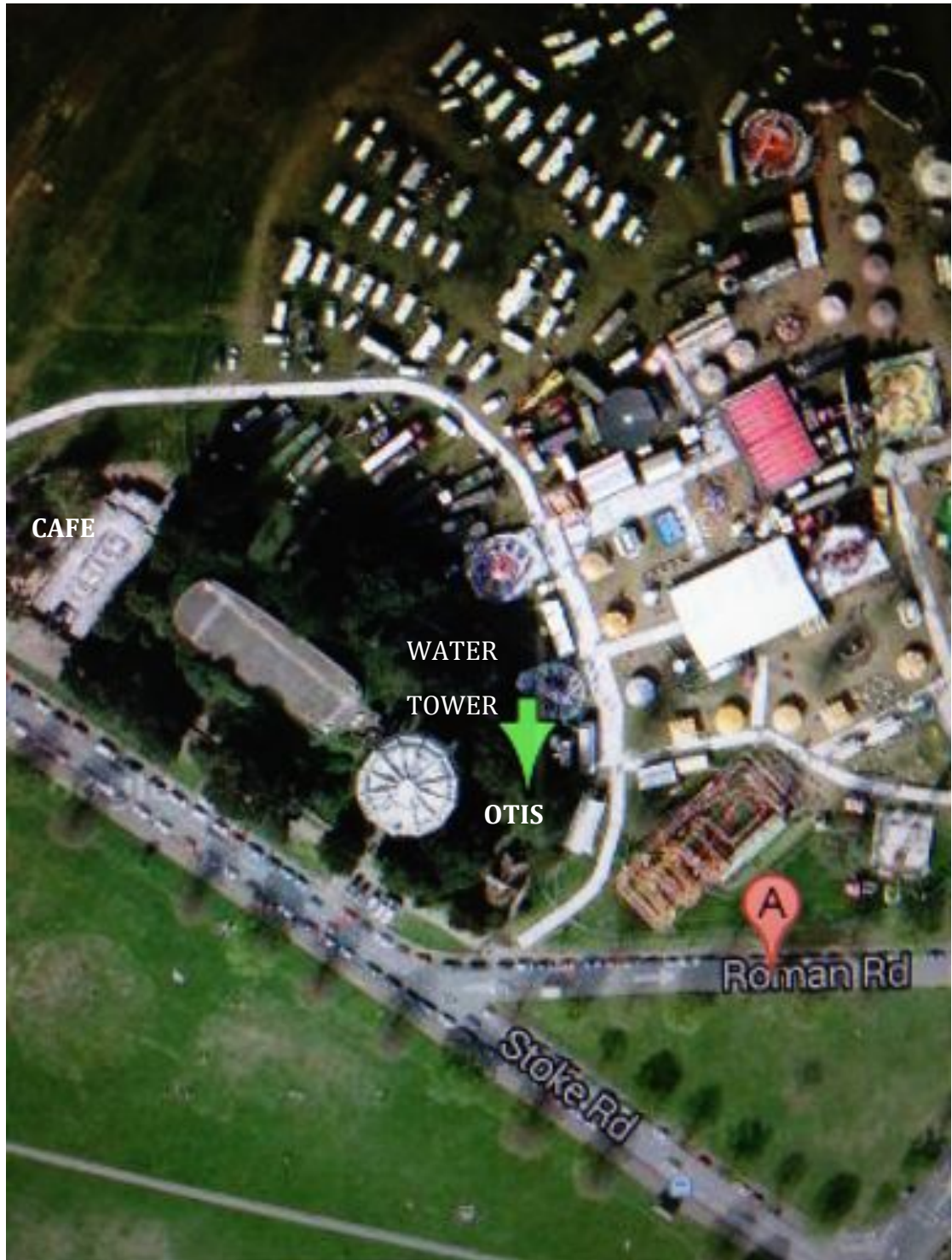


New

OTIS LOCATION "A"



OTIS LOCATION "B"





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Advertising

Our Training Is Safe

RoSPA approved and tried and tested across all ages and abilities. From children (supervised) to World champions and everyone in-between.

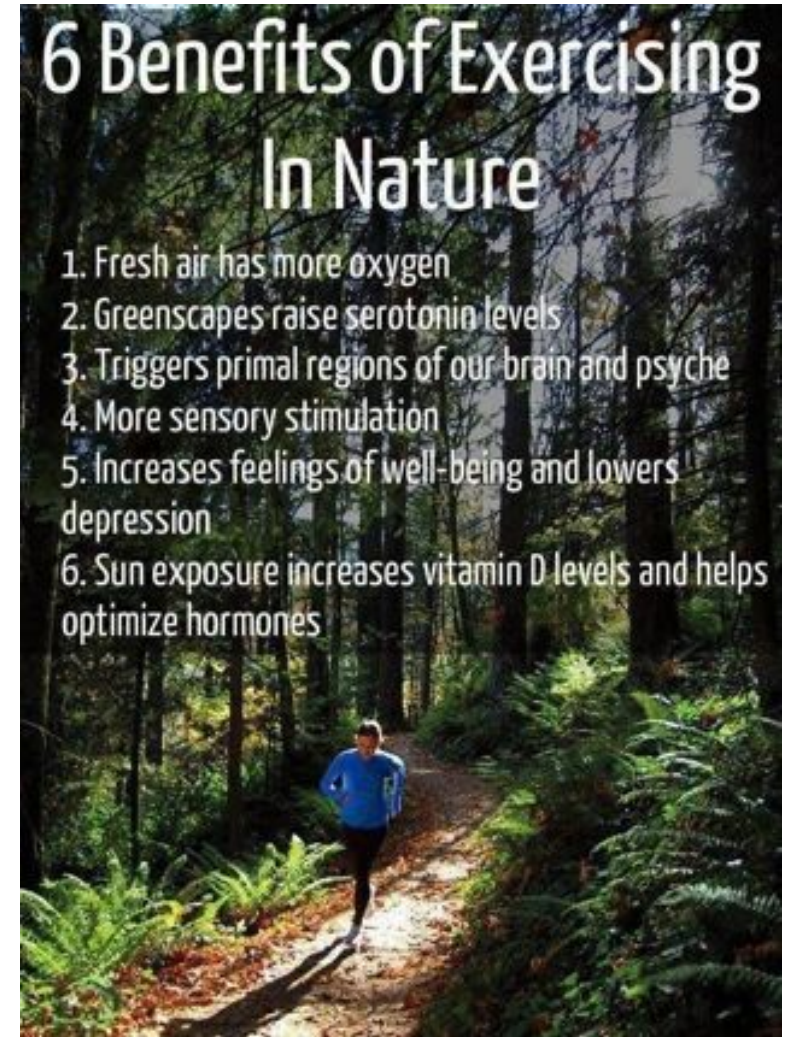


Physical Activity Guidelines in the UK: Review and Recommendations, Number 5

Outdoor Training Improves Social health

Free training gives access to the people that need to be engaged, the ones that will not join a gym. OTIS gives them a way to follow the **Government's physical activity guidelines of 2 or more strength training sessions per week.**

Training outdoors has proven health benefits.
OTIS, their health reborn.



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This unique functional stability training program involving movements performed in unstable slings clearly improved stability balance and reduced low back pain. To our knowledge this is the first study to demonstrate a direct performance enhancing effect of a core stability training program. Functional strength training in slings appears to be an effective modality for enhancing neuromuscular control and joint stability.

Stray Pedersen J.I, Magnussen R, Kuffel E. Seiler S. **Sling Exercise Training improves balance, kicking velocity and torso stabilisation strength in elite soccer players.** *Medicine & Science in Sport & Exercise* 38(5):S243, 2006



Create a community, create a change

Working together, we will create a community around the training. The use of Apps, social and local media to help engage people take the first step. It is proven that if you can create a community around a training system, you get more public engagement. Fitness engagement built around communities works



Fitness community Facebook followers

Les Mills 524,000 CrossFit 1,250,000 Insanity 3,525,000 Zumba 6,742,000

Low cost but effective

- 10 systems in 10 parks that will cover the whole city or town is approximately the cost of one or two other systems accessible.
- OTIS has over 400 exercises available, probably the most of any outdoor training system on the market.
- Designed by the person whose training system is used by British, European, World, Olympic, Paralympic champions, as well as teams like the British & Irish Lions, the RFU, the FA, Premiership Football and Rugby teams and many more.

ACTION NOT TALK

- Be a council associated with doing something about getting the country fitter and healthier on a national scale. Many talk about how unhealthy the population are, but there is not enough actually being done to get the country active on national community basis.

Our Training Is Social.

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Downs Committee Working Group

Notes and actions from a meeting held on 17 February 2014 to discuss inappropriate behaviour on the Downs.

Attending:

Anthony Brown, Master of the Merchant Venturers

Colin Smith, Councillor, Bristol City Council

D C Martin Davies, Avon and Somerset Police Service. (LGBT Liaison)

Martin Collins, Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge, (FODAG)

Robert Westlake, Downs Ranger, Bristol City Council.

Purpose of meeting.

The Downs Committee working group is tasked to consider an historical problem of inappropriate behaviour in certain areas of the Downs commonly known as a public sex environment, in particular heavily scrubbed areas off of the Circular Road. Concerns have been raised about incidents of sexual activity and the discarding of sex litter within this area of the Downs.

The Downs Committee whilst recognising the rights of others and mindful of the City Councils Public Sector Equality Duty have a clear responsibility to ensure that the Downs remain safe, clean and welcoming to **all** visitors.

The working group seeks to improve the management of these areas.

Context.

Reports and observations suggest that sexual activity and the litter generated could be considered inappropriate in the following context.

*Activities take place at times of the day when visitors to the Downs including children could be expected to visit these areas.

*Activities take place close to open areas of the Downs where visitors would not expect to come across this type of activity.

* Offensive litter, including, used condoms, lube dispensers, sex toys and pornography are left on site. Some items could be considered hazardous to health.

*Has the potential to create 'no-go' areas of the Downs and to create an atmosphere whereby other visitors could feel intimidated or threatened physically and/or emotionally.

* The Downs Ranger does not have the resource available to provide a more comprehensive litter clearance service.

Actions so far.

*D C Davies clarified that Avon and Somerset Police Service operate to an agreed protocol for the management of this type of activity and will respond to complaints of overt sexual activity.

DC Davies reported that 3 complaints had been received in the last year. The Downs Ranger had received a similar number but the operational team had witnessed sexual activity. FODAG volunteers had also observed sexual activity.

* The Downs team have increased the frequency of litter patrols and have enlisted the Probation Service to assist with this task. FODAG volunteers have until recently cleared sex litter from these areas but currently clearance in these areas have been suspended.

* The Downs Committee have authorised a phased programme of scrub clearance across the Downs as part of its conservation plan. As **part** of that plan and over successive years problem areas of scrub have been cleared. This has been successful in part but has had the effect of moving the problem to other scrubbed areas.

Actions to consider.

Several suggestions were discussed that may deliver a positive outcome, including.

The installation of advisory notices at key locations, text to be prepared and agreed. **Action (RW)**

The location of waste bins at strategic locations **Action (RW)**

Review the scrub clearance programme **Action (RW)**

Improve liaison with partner organisations, eg Terrence Higgins Trust and to investigate relevant online forums and message boards. **Action D C Davies to contact (MD)**

D C Davies to contact local beat team to discuss current situation. **Action (MD)**

Make contact with other core cities that may have a similar problem and see how they manage. **Action (RW)**

Open up a circular walk to improve access. **(This is an aspiration of the Downs Management Plan)**

Contact the City Councils Equalities team within Bristol City Council for advice and guidance. **Action (RW)**

Enlarge the goat grazing area. **(This is an action identified within the Downs Management Plan)**

Conclusion.

The Downs Committee has a responsibility to ensure that the Downs are safe, clean, accessible and welcoming to all visitors. In seeking to deal with this problem the Committee has always been mindful not only of its responsibilities to the wider public but to ensure that any actions taken on its behalf are not seen as discriminatory, open to misinterpretation or not act in any way that does recognise the rights of others.

Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer's Monthly Report February 2014

Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer

- Interviews for the seasonal education officer took place in the middle of the month. Last year's seasonal education officer, Joss Smithson, applied and was appointed again. This is fantastic news for us as he already knows all of the sessions and the groups we work with so he's able to hit the ground running!

Events

- Martin Collins and Timothy Dowling from FODAG gave a talk about the butterfly monitoring scheme on the Avon Gorge and Downs. 39 people attended.
- 17 children from The Centre (formally Our Place) playscheme spent a fantastic morning learning about birds and how they feed. We were lucky enough to have a peregrine fly-past and extremely close-up views of a greenfinch and a robin singing. In the afternoon we made birdfeeders from recycled plastic bottles, fatball cones and raisin and apple hedgehogs for the children to take home for their garden birds.
- 12 children came to the 'Birdbox bonanza' half-term children's event. We spent a morning on the Downs learning about birds and how they make their nests, creating clay birds and fashioning nests from natural materials. In the afternoon a couple who run a company called Specialised nest boxes bought bird box kits along and taught the children to construct their own nest box which they later took home.
- Unfortunately, due to poor weather on the evening the 5th February, the star party had to be cancelled. The work to set it up hasn't gone to waste as we're running a star party on the 10th March (which 60 people have booked for) and we will be running another on either the 7th or 8th April.
- A press release about Mike Dilger's talk on the 4th March was produced, and resulted in a lot of bookings.

Bristol Festival of Nature

- I met with Josie Sadler and Mellie May from the Bristol City Council TreePips team. We're going to be sharing a tent with them at this year's festival, as the 'Wild Bristol' tent. We've begun planning the content of the tent.
- The AGD portion of the tent will be on a peregrine theme. I've already contacted a number of other people to partner with us and the following is a draft of what we intend to have:
 - I've contacted Hotwells Primary school and they're keen to meet to discuss a school's peregrine project in the run-up to the festival. After an educational visit to the Downs, we'll create some artwork / display which showcases what the kids have learnt and provides content for the tent.
 - Joss and I will run a mini version of our peregrine falcons and foodchains education session for the schools day. We'll also have a learning / craft area in the tent for the festival weekend and for little children an area with toy peregrine chicks for play weighing, measuring and ringing and a matching prey remains to the birds they came from activity for older kids.
 - Ed Drewitt is aiming to produce a display about his study into what peregrines eat and his ringing work and he'll also be selling copies of his new Urban peregrine book. Ed has also offered to give a talk about urban peregrines as part of the festival programme.
 - Bertie Gregory, a 19 year-old fabulous photographer, will display six of his stunning images of the Avon Gorge, Castle Park and London peregrines on the walls of the tent.
 - I've also talked to a BBC producer and we're discussing the possibility / feasibility of creating a short film about peregrine watching on the Downs to show on the big screen in Millennium Square or even better we might be able to have a live camera feed from peregrines in Castle Park and maybe the Downs.
 - The Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) will also bring along a display to talk about the peregrine watch weekends on the Downs.
- I've also begun planning a Bristol Festival of Nature outreach event (what was Bristol99 last year) with members of FODAG and local naturalists. It's to take place on the Downs on the 12th July and will consist of a mixture of public walks and activities for invited groups. The BOC will also be running

a peregrine watch that weekend, so as well as butterfly walks and bug hunting we'll be able to offer peregrine-spotting as well.

Your Downs

- The Downs Ranger, Jack Penrose and Robin Haward (from FODAG) and I met for a Your Downs meeting. A whole series of walks are being planned, we talked about the next star party, the Bristol Festival of Nature outreach event and the Wool and weave event (planned for September).

Talks to community groups

- I gave a talk to 41 people at the Avon WI federation meeting. This was a great opportunity as two people from each of the Avon WIs came to the meeting and should result in more of the individual WIs asking for me to deliver talks. The federation are following up the talk with two guided tours on the Downs, on the 24th June.

Volunteers and work experience students

- During February, 3 volunteers and 1 work experience student gave 37.5 hours of their time.

Other

- I spoke to Nicola Humphries from the BBC Radio 4 Open Country programme. She's keen to do one of the programmes on the Avon Gorge and Downs. We talked about potential story ideas and people to interview. If she decides to go ahead the programme will be recorded in April.
- I went on a two-day first aid re-qualification course.
- I attended the steering group planning meeting.
- I attended a really useful training course about the changes to the National Curriculum which are coming in, in September.
- Helen Jeffrey, the Community Learning & Volunteer Officer for the Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust came in to the office to look at our picture library. She will be using a selection of our images to illustrate the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs and the work of the project in their new visitors centre.
- I met with Tania Dorrity, Learning Officer at the Wild Place Project.

28th February 2014

Best place to see stars in your eyes

THE Downs is apparently one of the best places in Bristol for star gazing.

Away from the worst of Bristol's light pollution, and without too many trees and buildings to obstruct your view, it is one of the top locations in the country to look at the night sky, according to a new list.

Durham Down is one of a host of "Dark Sky Discovery Sites" across the country revealed recently.

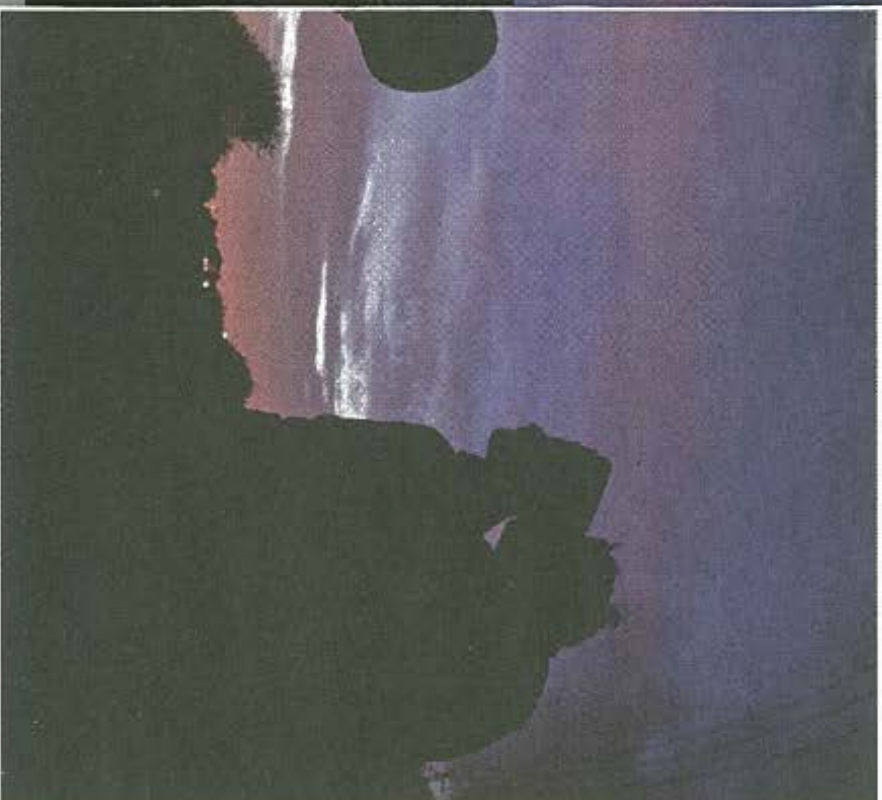
It is the second local site to be given this special title, the first of which was Victoria Park in Totterdown.

And to make the most of this, a "star party" is being held on the Downs for the first time in February.

On Wednesday, February 5, budding astronomers can head to the site for a spot of star gazing – it will be an ideal place to see the winter constellation Orion.

The star party is being organised by the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project, Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge, the Bristol Astronomical Society and Explorer Dome.

Shaaron Leverment from Explorer Dome and the Bristol Astronomical



Society, said: "Members of the Bristol Astronomical Society will be on-hand with their telescopes to amaze you with a view of the surface of the moon, the planet Jupiter and the Andromeda Galaxy."

"We'll also teach you how to spot the main winter constellations and

Astronomers can make the most of Durham Down's new Dark Sky Discovery Sites status

you can enjoy hearing about the stories written in the stars. A warm drink and star-shaped cookie will be on offer courtesy of the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge."

Booking is essential as places are limited – call 0117 9030609 or e-mail mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk

